

## Should Huck Finn be Banned?

By: [S. K. R.](#)

America's historical revisionists have mobilized their P.C. armies again, this time attempting to rip the novel *Huckleberry Finn* from the hands of school children around the nation, thus adding it to their growing index of blacklisted classics. Why is this time-honored, American milestone being removed from teachers' curriculum? The idea seems ridiculous but the logic behind it is even more dubious; apparently the pejorative "nigger" is not allowed to exist in a historical context. However, Huck Finn's use of the slur is a necessary part of the novel, reflecting a broken period in American history, teaching children the dangers of bigotry, and providing hope that American democracy's greatest moral obstacle can be overcome.

The novel *Huckleberry Finn*, defined by its realism, is a literary vehicle that Mark Twain uses to paint a picture of a nation that is divided both regionally and racially. The story takes place prior to the Civil War, prior to emancipation, and prior to any sort of constitutional guarantee of black rights, i.e., the 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, and 15<sup>th</sup> amendments. Huck

Finn, a boy raised in the Southern slaveholding states, has been taught a certain "moral" ethic his entire life. This ethic is a dangerous code of bigotry, one that states that blacks are inferior beings, created to serve their white masters. Thus, Huck Finn has been molded by a racist society, making his use of the term "nigger" realistic.

This backward moral philosophy is reflected when Huck discusses his friendship with a runaway slave Jim, stating "Here was this nigger which I as good as helped to run away, coming right out flat footed and saying that he would steal his children, children that belonged to a man I didn't know, a man that never done no harm to me" (89). Passages such as this do not reflect Twain's own moral philosophy, they reflect Huck Finn's, thus illustrating the attitude of the South during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. "Nigger" was, unfortunately, part of the lexicon at the time, making it vital to a novel trying to portray a certain region with historical accuracy. To ignore this term is to ignore a dark chapter of American history, a trend that is dangerous to say the least. This novel educates school children on a period in time, not on racism.

Beyond the historical context of the novel, *Huckleberry Finn* serves an even greater purpose, teaching children the dangers of bigotry. Through the lens of historical reality, Twain is able to reveal the human anguish slavery causes. An example of this is when Huck's friend, Miss Mary Jane, is forced to sell her slaves and break up their family. Huck describes the moment, saying, "And it was the niggers . . . she didn't know how she was ever going to be happy there, knowing the mother and children warn't ever going to see each other no more" (187). First, passages such as this portray blacks as humans, describing them in the context of families and relationships with other human beings. Furthermore, it depicts what was a historical commonplace, black families being split up and sold into bondage.

This injustice strikes at a basic American desire for freedom. It makes the reader see the atrocity of slavery for what it was, thus educating him or her on the dangers of bigotry in general. The use of the term "nigger" in the passage associates it with the abomination of slavery, helping the reader realize the true dangers of the term. All of this put together gives a negative portrait of racism and the word "nigger," making the novel vital to a student's

education, giving him or her a crash course in the heavy implications of bigotry.

Perhaps even more significant than revealing the dangers of bigotry, *Huckleberry Finn* provides hope for a more equal and tolerant future. The novel revolves around one core relationship, that being between Huck Finn and the runaway slave Jim. In the beginning of the story, Huck treats Jim like any other white person would; as a piece of property. At one point Huck even resolves to send Jim back to his master, stating afterwards that, "I felt good and all washed of sin for the first time I hard feld in my life, and I knowed I could pray now" (215).

However, as the novel progresses, Huck and Jim become closer, eventually viewing each other as friends and equals. Instead of referring to Jim as a "nigger," Huck begins to talk about him as a human, resolving to, "steal Jim out of slavery again" (216). Passages such as this show Huck working to overcome the injustices of society and help a friend win his freedom, providing hope that some day friendship will be more important than race. At one point even Tom Sawyer, Huck's friend and accomplice in breaking Jim out, yells, "He ain't no slave; he's as free as any creature that walks the earth" (289). These kids, both

children of the South who were educated in racism, manage to overcome their once blinding prejudices and view Jim as a person, risking their own safety to free him from bondage. This lesson is important to any student, highlighting that society is not always correct in its standards and that personal beliefs are often the basis for positive change. These universal themes make *Huckleberry Finn* a mountain of a novel that cannot be left out of teachers' curriculum.

Although Mark Twain's masterpiece *Huckleberry Finn* has been under siege from many politically motivated organizations and action groups in recent years, educators and parents cannot forget the significance of the novel to their students and children. *Huck Finn* teaches pupils about a period in history, about the dangers of bigotry, and provides hope for a more egalitarian future. The real threat to students around the nation is not Twain's novel. Instead it is a new, more open trend towards censorship in which historical fact and modern issues are being disguised through blacklisting. In order to guarantee a full and honest education for America's students, this trend must be stopped now.

*Works Cited*

Twain, Mark. *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Austin, Texas: Holt, Reinhart, and Winston  
1995.